

Recommended Resource: Picturebooks in European Primary English Language Teaching (PEPELT) Mini e-Lessons

Website: <https://pepelt21.com/mini-e-lessons>

Alison Hasegawa

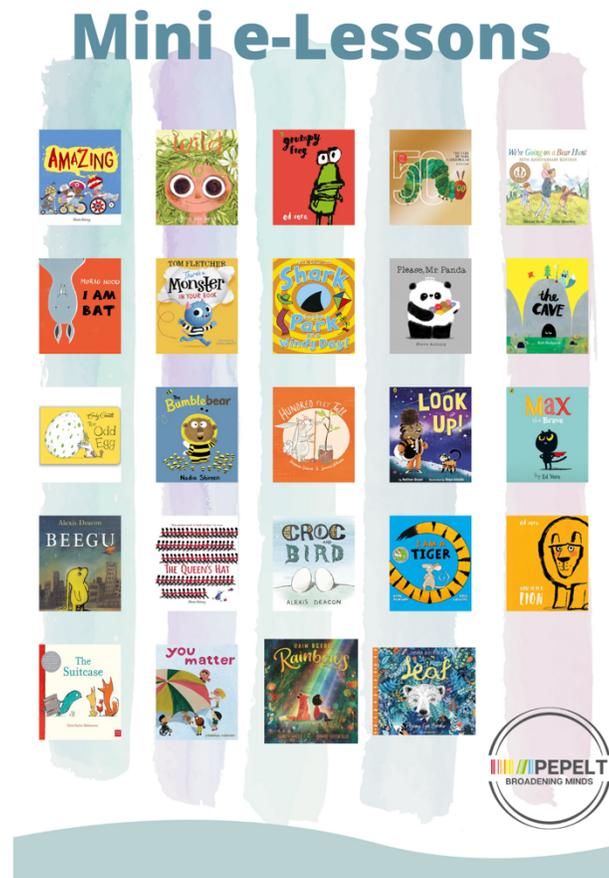


Figure 1. Picturebook front covers used in the mini e-lessons
(Photo by PEPELT, 2021)

Introducing the PEPELT Mini e-Lessons

Entering the new academic year, I am thrilled to meet with my new student teachers here in Japan and share with them my latest picturebook purchase, *Rain Before Rainbows*, written by Smriti Halls and illustrated by David Litchfield. I will be reading it online with my 50 primary English student teachers and sharing it with children at a physically distanced English picturebook read-aloud

session in a local library. I have been coveting this beautiful picturebook since October 2020, when it was featured on the **Picturebooks in European Primary English Language Teaching (PEPELT)** website. I immediately downloaded the free version made available by Walker Books, noted the useful suggestions about ways to use it, but did not actually have a chance to share it with my student teachers. This spring 2021, I wanted to pay back the publisher's generosity by buying the hardback version and while preparing my session for my student teachers, I discovered even more ideas. This process of discovery started because it was featured as one of the titles in the ever-expanding (24 to date) PEPELT mini e-lessons library, which I will be focusing on in this recommendation.

Origins of Online Picturebook Read-Alouds

Looking back, it was around this time last year, as lockdown or restricted movements were enforced globally, that in our isolation we moved online, making the virtual domain more of a lifeline than ever before. People around the world wanted to feel connected, get news and important information about the unfolding health crisis and of course, be entertained. However, for many primary English language teachers and teacher educators, it was also a time when suddenly we likewise had to rapidly learn how to teach through this medium. Thankfully, as we faced the challenge of adjusting to digital instruction, the global ELT community began reaching out and supporting each other – English teachers shared useful digital tools, as well as age-appropriate digital pedagogies. Picturebook creators like Steve Antony and Emily Gravett offered support too, by uploading video recordings of read-alouds of their picturebooks for parents, caregivers and teachers alike to make use of. Using actual print picturebooks for reading aloud is, I believe, a vital part of young learner English language education, but during this pandemic, the online read-aloud has gradually proven its real value as a flexible alternative, especially for 'at home' schooling.

The PEPELT mini e-lessons follow this trend. They were initially developed in March 2020 as a response to the challenges primary English language teachers were facing, as they strived to support children's learning in various environments. They were created by Gail Ellis and Tatia Gruenbaum, two of the founding members of the PEPELT team, and can be utilized flexibly in both synchronous and asynchronous primary English language learning contexts. They also have the advantage of combining all the necessary resources for each e-lesson in one place, which can be easily shared via a single QR code.

The 5-step Learning and Teaching Sequence

This freely available resource library provides primary English language teachers with a detailed and versatile collection of lesson plans, each of which focuses on an enjoyable, inspiring and thought-provoking picturebook. It is highly advisable to have a copy of each picturebook in the classroom, but where there are access challenges, there is no requirement to purchase the actual featured books. This is because the questions and tasks for the **pre-while-post** viewing stages of each lesson have been designed to be used with the accompanying YouTube video of the picturebook creators reading their titles aloud. These carefully selected video recordings of picturebook read-alouds expose children to authentic language in English as well as diversity aspects and values such as kindness, tolerance, and friendship, all crucial facets of children's socio-emotional development.

Ellis and Gruenbaum's approach to the mini e-lessons is based on their aim to create real communication around picturebook visual and verbal text, carefully scaffolding primary learners of English to both interpret and personalize the content and themes. Each mini e-lesson plan includes a very clear teaching-learning sequence, comprising in part questions and tasks for a teacher to draw upon instantly if necessary. Another user-friendly feature is that the format of the plans is consistent, so once teachers and children have worked through an initial e-lesson, they can then comfortably continue employing the same procedure for the following lessons. Considering the lesson plan sequencing in greater detail, in Step 1, there is a pre-viewing activity that involves looking at the image of the cover of the book (see Figure 1). Working with the suggested questions, learners are encouraged to notice, predict, research, check or relate personally to the cover, in preparation for watching the creator read their picturebook in the YouTube video. Then, in Steps 2 and 3, the learners watch and listen to the author reading the picturebook through the link provided on the same page. It is suggested children first view for global understanding and enjoyment in Part A, and then, in Part B they watch again and respond to more interpretative questions, pausing and replaying as necessary. Step 4 is titled 'Add your Voice', and includes personalized, creative tasks, after which in Step 5, learners 'Share and Evaluate' their work using the reader-response and self-evaluation forms. These could be shared digitally or posted on a board in the face-to-face classroom, read and commented on by other children in the class, creating a sense of inclusion and community, while celebrating each child's originality and sense of creativity.

Developing Wider Educational Goals

In addition to these 5 clear steps, there is a section titled 'Want more?', where there are video links to a sign-language version of the story, or a video in which the creator demonstrates how to draw a character from the picturebook, step by step. This powerful experience of seeing a professional illustrator at work has the potential to ignite children's interests in art or design, or perhaps even inspire them to become an artist or author-illustrator themselves in the future. Also, drawing along with an artist is a satisfying and rewarding activity in itself. As well as challenging children to engage with the picturebook plots deeply, throughout the e-lessons, children are asked to apply a wide variety of core skills. These include observing illustrations closely, noticing details, checking relevant facts, researching additional information, predicting story outcomes, thinking about underlying messages, relating the characters to themselves by personalizing, creating something concrete in response to the picturebook and finally, reviewing their picturebook e-lesson experience and giving their opinions.

Another important aspect is the connections made to cross-curricular content. For example, a pre-viewing prompt for *Shark in the Park* read-aloud by author Nick Sharratt is 'What is a telescope?' and 'How does it work?' The post-viewing task is 'Find out five facts about sharks', which activates prior science knowledge and leads to developing knowledge about the natural world. Similarly, in the e-lesson for *The Bumblebear* read-aloud by author Nadia Shireen, a pre-viewing prompt also connected to science is 'What do bees make?', and the post-viewing task is 'Make your own Bumblebear daily planner'. Therefore, the learners need to review and reorganize the information from the picturebook, creating their own original schedule of Bumblebear's day. Another example of a post-viewing task to develop creativity is in the e-lesson based on the picturebook *Please, Mr Panda* read aloud by author Steve Antony. The learners are asked to 'Design your own doughnut', and a convenient link to a template is provided as a scaffold.

Final Recommendation

Due to space constraints, I cannot introduce all 24 wonderful picturebooks and the accompanying mini e-lessons, so I recommend browsing this virtual library and most importantly, trying out these lessons with your own primary learners of English. One comment that particularly resonated with me was when author Christian Robinson, during his video about his picturebook *You Matter*, says: 'I wanted to show that no matter how small you are, no matter how close or far away you are from

the people you care about and love, YOU MATTER!' Robinson's assertion exemplifies that the lessons are especially relevant for children who might be feeling fragile and how in these uncertain times, focusing on a beautiful or even quirky picturebook is a highly meaningful activity, one that can bring great joy and comfort. Also, this collection of selected picturebooks can provide primary learners of English with 'mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors' (Sims Bishop, 1990). Through the recordings of the read-alouds, brought to life on YouTube by the picturebook creators, I hope children not only see themselves reflected, but also in this period when travel is so restricted, they can look out through these beautiful picturebook windows and enjoy seeing different views of the world, if only in their imaginations. And in so doing, they can perhaps even venture beyond these windows, walking out of glass doors, as in the words of Sims Bishop, 'These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author' (1990, ix).

Bibliography

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- Sims Bishop, R. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, 6(3), ix-xi.

<https://fall15worldlitforchildren.wordpress.com/mirrors-windows-sliding-glass-doors/>

Alison Hasegawa is originally from the United Kingdom, and since 1989 has lived and worked in Japan. She first taught at primary and middle schools and is currently a Specially Appointed Professor at Miyagi University of Education. She enjoys sharing her collection of over 200 picturebooks with children and student teachers in English language education.